

might be recalled, as the King's subjects were being brought into * serfage to the said Seigneurs and commissioners and their retinues.'

A very similar story is told in * *Piers Plowman*,¹ where 'Peace' comes to Parliament with a petition against * Wrong/ who, in his capacity of King's officer, has broken into the farm, ravished the women, carried off the horses, taken the wheat from the granary, and left in payment a tally on the King's exchequer. * Peace' complains that he has been unable to get the law of him, for 'he maintaineth his men to murder mine own.'² Such were the King's officers as known in the country districts. They were really ambitious lords using the King's name to acquire wealth for themselves. These evils were partly the result of the bankruptcy of the government. The King could not change the military system, because he could not hire men to take the place of the nobles' retainers. He had to accept the aid of his lords for the French wars very much on their own terms. Sometimes he could not pay them the full price of the services of the men they brought into the field, and could not therefore venture to offend them.³ In the bankrupt state of the exchequer, an understanding between the nobility and the government was necessary if the war was to be carried on at all. This at once prevented any serious effort to break up the bands of retainers throughout the country, and enabled the great lords to claim as their natural right a large share in the general administration. An apologist for Richard the Second might claim with some show of truth that he fought and fell in the effort to free the King's counsels from the thral-dom of this intrusive and domineering aristocracy. But in the period with which this chapter deals, Richard was but a boy. The nobles would during his minority have conducted the government of the country exactly as they pleased but for two checks: they were divided among themselves by the quarrels and rival interests, of the great families, and they met with staunch resistance from the members of the House of Commons.

¹ *Rot. Parl.*, iii. 42, 65; *Stats. of Realm*, 2 R. IT. 6.

* P. PZ., A., iv, 84-48.

* E^h. *Hot. Parl.*, iii. 12U, sou, 8.